

*Naturalization Delays*

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**Washington, DC** – U.S. Representative Luis V. Gutierrez (D-IL), a member of the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration, today responded to testimony provided by Emilio T. Gonzalez, the director of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, who said that from now until 2010, the agency will take an average of 18 months -- up from seven months or less last year -- to process petitions for citizenship.

"Immigrants who are living, working and contributing to our country have been deeply criticized, simply for wanting to earn citizenship," said Rep. Gutierrez. "These immigrants deserve a system that processes their requests efficiently, and which allows them to respond to these demonizing and xenophobic attacks by exercising their right to vote for political leadership who will represent their contributions."

When Mr. Gonzalez implemented a 2007 midyear fee increase of 66 percent for handling immigration documents, he announced that additional funds would be put towards reducing the naturalization and permanent resident visa wait times, as well as preventing future backlogs.

Yet in the Chicago area alone, there are 37,480 applications currently pending, and the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights estimates that several hundred thousand applications nationwide will not be processed in time for the November 2008 presidential elections.

"I am committed to doing everything possible to remove roadblocks to citizenship, including holding the responsible agencies accountable for a lack of preparation to accommodate the anticipated rise in applications. In the coming weeks, the Subcommittee will also be looking to the FBI to scrutinize what appears to be a complete failure to efficiently adjudicate these people, who desperately want to become citizens and contribute to a better, more dynamic America."

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